

California Regional Water Quality Control Board
Santa Ana Region

January 22, 2004

ITEM: 24

SUBJECT: Executive Officer's Report

DISCUSSION:

1. **City of Ontario Pump Station Failures** – Since April 2003, the City of Ontario has experienced three large sewage spills from its Whispering Lakes Lift Station. On April 9, 2003, 45,000 gallons of raw sewage spilled. A second spill occurred on the following day, resulting in 600,000 gallons of sewage being discharged. In response to these spills, the City implemented several improvements to prevent future spills. Nevertheless, on October 17, 2003, the station again failed, resulting in approximately 180,000 gallons of raw sewage being discharged. Fortunately, in the case of all three spills, the City was able to contain all of the wastewater on adjacent farmland where it was either pumped back into the sewer system or percolated into the soil. All of the contaminated soil was then removed and/or disinfected.

The first spill resulted from a power spike causing fuses to be blown in the motor control panel. The fuses were replaced and two of the pumps were reactivated. The following day, City staff attempted to open an inspection plate in the force main prior to the start-up of the third available pump. Unfortunately, solids that had accumulated during the previous day when the pumps were off fell through and broke a shear pin on a plug valve, resulting in the inability of any of the pumps to pump into the force main.

In response to these spills, the City installed two manually operated temporary by-pass pumps, rebuilt three motors and pumps, replaced check valves, enhanced their SCADA monitoring and alarm system, installed moisture detectors on all motors to detect seal failures, and increased their testing and inspection schedule for all pump stations.

As noted above, a third spill occurred six months later. Again, the cause of the spill was attributed to a power surge. The surge caused a breaker to be tripped, which shut down power to the station. Normally, the SCADA system would have sent an alarm; however, the backup battery to the radio system was inoperable. As a result of this spill, the City installed a backup phone system and implemented procedures for routine testing and change-out of the batteries in

both systems. The City also undertook several additional actions to prevent further spills, including: rotating the use of the pumps in the station daily so that they will all operate for the same number of hours; adding additional standby equipment to their inventory; installing a portable generator with an auto transfer switch, should Edison power be lost; and installing a new by-pass pump that will automatically activate if the water level in the wet well reaches a specified level.

The City also retained a consultant to review the configuration and operation of the lift station. The City plans to use this review to identify and implement additional actions that are necessary to ensure that the equipment and electronics at the lift station are protected.

The City and the Inland Empire Utilities Agency (IEUA) are constructing an interceptor/bypass to convey sewage currently sent to IEUA's Regional Plant #1 to their new Regional Plant #5. Design of this project is nearly complete. The interceptor has been designed to eliminate the need for three City lift stations. Although the initial design did not include acceptance of flow from the Whispering Lakes lift station, an element has been added to the project to determine if grade elevations would allow interim connection to allow it to be taken out of service, as well.

2. **Perchlorate in Bunker Hill Basin Wells** – In November 2003, the General Manager of the City of San Bernardino Municipal Water Department contacted me to request a meeting to discuss the presence of perchlorate in municipal supply wells in the western portion of the Bunker Hill Basin, north of Norton Air Force Base. In this area, perchlorate has been detected in seventeen municipal wells belonging to the East Valley Water District, City of San Bernardino, City of Riverside, Patton State Hospital and the Inland Valley Development Agency (Norton Air Force Base property), in concentrations ranging from 4.0 to 16.0 ppb.

On December 22, Board staff met with representatives from the East Valley Water District and the Cities of San Bernardino and Riverside. The consensus of these water purveyors was that a unified effort was necessary to evaluate the occurrence and determine the potential sources of perchlorate in this area. The water purveyors decided to contact Wildermuth Environmental, Inc., to prepare a work plan. The work plan would be used by East Valley Water District to prepare a Request For Proposal to hire a consultant to perform the work. It is the water purveyors' desire that Board staff play a leading role in overseeing this investigation. During a follow-up meeting on December 29, Mark Wildermuth was present and agreed to prepare the work plan. We expect that the work plan will be completed by the third week of January. I am encouraged by the pro-

active approach and the cooperative relationship exhibited by the East Valley Water District and the Cities of San Bernardino and Riverside in making resources available to pursue this action to address their perchlorate issues.

3. **Report by California State Auditor Regarding Supplemental Environmental Projects** – On December 17, 2003, the California State Auditor released a report based on its review of the State And Regional Boards' collection of fines and administration of water quality improvement projects. The review evaluated both projects funded by the State Board through the Cleanup and Abatement Account (CAA) and supplemental environmental projects (SEPs) overseen by Regional Boards. The audit team reviewed four Regional Boards (San Francisco Bay Region, Central Valley Region, San Diego Region and Santa Ana Region) in detail. The report identified deficiencies in how Regional Boards oversee SEPs, but did not make any specific recommendations for Regional Board follow-up action. Instead, the report recommended that the State Board provide assistance and guidance to the Regional Boards to enhance the effectiveness of the relevant programs. Our review of the audit report indicates that its findings are accurate and its recommendations are appropriate.

We will implement any guidance received from the State Board in response to the audit. In addition, staff believes that we should be cautious in our review of future SEP proposals. Overseeing SEP implementation is more resource intensive than directing payment to the CAA. The deficiencies in SEP oversight cited in the report are due to resource constraints, and resources in our enforcement programs have declined due to budget reductions. Therefore, we must consider resource implications of approving additional SEPs.